
Department of Energy

Alaskan Cooperative Wins Wind Award

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A rural Alaskan electric cooperative was honored for breaking new ground with Alaska's first wind megawatt class turbine project. The Kodiak Electric Association received the Wind Cooperative of the Year Award for its Pillar Mountain Wind Project.

The award, sponsored by the Energy Department and the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, recognizes KEA for leadership in advancing wind power. Boosters of Pillar Mountain see the project as the first step toward wind power at other Alaskan utilities, freeing them from the state's dependence on diesel power generation.

The association is on Kodiak Island and serves just less than 6,000 electric meters on the island of about 12,000 people. This puts Kodiak well off the mainland grid, requiring it to generate and store its own electricity. CEO Darron Scott says KEA has used a hydroelectric plant at Terror Lake to generate about 83 percent of its electricity during the past 30 years. But like many rural Alaskan utilities, KEA depended on diesel for the remainder of its electricity.

“Generally, in rural Alaska, diesel ends up being the mainstay,” he says. “Some areas have some hydroelectric, but a lot are forced to stay with diesel.”

Since its completion in July of 2009, Pillar Mountain has generated about 9 percent of the Island's total power and cut diesel consumption by approximately 50 percent.

KEA is now hoping to apply what it learned to help other Alaskan utilities use wind as an alternative to diesel. Not only is this better for the environment, but also it lowers members' electric bills. It also brings the cooperative closer to its goal of generating 95 percent of its electricity from renewable sources by 2020.

Editor's note: Story was updated on August 3 to correct power generation and diesel consumption figures.

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